

## **Tales of a Talking Oyster: How shoreline owners have rolled up their sleeves to restore private shellfish beds plagued with bacterial contamination in lower Hood Canal.**

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The unprecedented closure of 630 acres of shellfish beds in 1987 and another 960 acres in 1993 caused great concern to shoreline residents on Hood Canal thus creating a monitoring program, the State of the Oyster Study. This program, funded entirely by volunteers works to sample private beaches looking for fecal coliform and *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* bacteria in shellfish. The data generated is used by the property owners to help identify problems with upland activities in their neighborhoods. Data collected in early years was often above the 230 f.c./100g. oyster tissue standard, while since 2003 only one sample has been above the standard. Volunteers have found and corrected a number of failed on-site sewage systems and pet waste problems and worked with local, state and tribal entities on regional projects such as on-site sewage maintenance and watershed planning. Volunteers are provided with many opportunities to work on other issues such as nearshore restoration, geoduck planting, septic soldier and fecal ferret programs, and dissolved oxygen monitoring. With over 80 beaches a year being tested during the sampling sessions each summer, the volunteers feel great ownership and pride in their efforts and the shellfish beds are getting cleaner and staying that way.